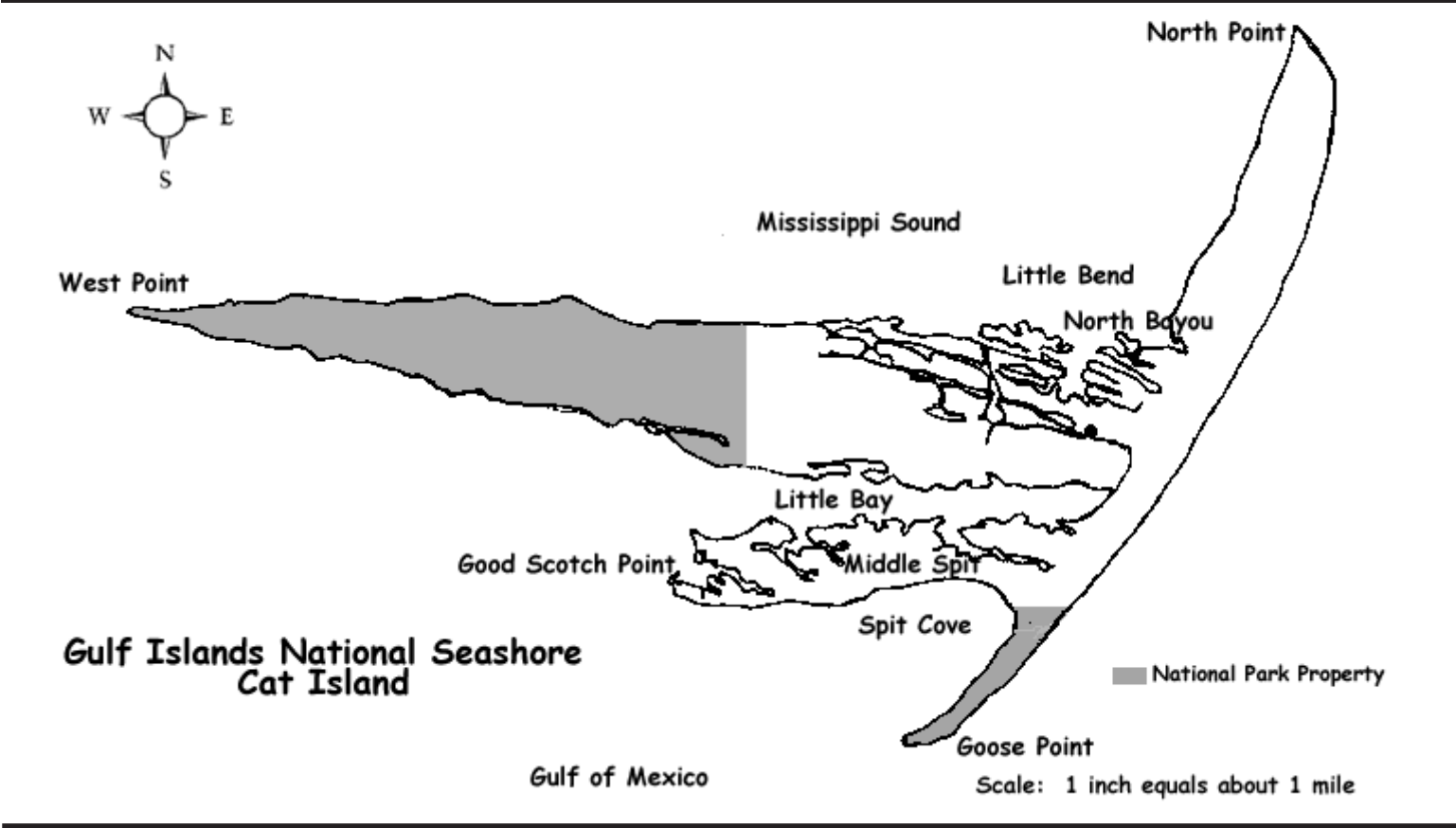


## Cat Island



America’s Newest  
Natural Treasure:  
A Wildlife Haven

It’s official! **The Trust for Public Land** has bought the first of several sections of Cat Island to be added to Gulf Islands National Seashore, one of more than 385 parks in the National Park system. Some seven miles from Gulfport, Mississippi, Cat Island is one of the few islands on the entire U.S. Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico coasts that is largely wild in character. Protecting this island treasure, a haven for alligators, shorebirds, and its namesake raccoons (see below), is a gift to all Americans. The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.



*Isle Aux Chats*  
“Isle of Cats”



Tradition has it that 17<sup>th</sup> century French explorers from Canada had never seen raccoons before setting foot on this island and called the animals “chats” or “cats”. *Chat sauvage* (wild cat) is the Mississippi Valley French term for raccoons.

Reflections on the History of Cat Island

**Aboriginal Use.** It may be assumed that in the past native tribes once used the island for food gathering activities on a seasonal basis. However violent storms have since disturbed the island and there is no visible evidence left today.

**European Exploration and Occupation.** The island was explored and charted in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the Spanish. Traditional stories include incidents of pirates using the island before the French arrived in 1699. Pierre LeMoyne D’Iberville and his men anchored four vessels near Ship Island before exploring the islands now known as Cat, Ship, Horn, and Dauphin Islands.

*On these islands we are killing raccoons, which live here off shellfish. Their fur is reddish brown. —D’Iberville*

Between 1754 and 1757 Swiss mercenaries were positioned by the French to watch for British naval vessels. Late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century control of the area, including the islands, was held intermittently by either the Spanish, the British or the French. In 1781, Juan de Cuevas of Biloxi received a Spanish land grant for the western end of Cat Island.



(Dog kennels on Cat Island circa 1943. Army File photo courtesy of Johnny Johnson.)

**State of Mississippi.** In 1810 the area was joined to the Union as part of the Republic of West Florida and later in 1817 in the state of Mississippi. The British occupied Ship and Cat Islands en route to New Orleans in 1814 and stopped there after losing the Battle of New Orleans. Because of the amount of shipping traffic near Cat Island a lighthouse was placed on the island in 1859. However the island gained a reputation for harboring pirates, bootleggers, and smugglers from the early 1800s through the 1920s.

**Cat Island Trade.** A steam sawmill and kilns for making charcoal were built on the island during the Civil War. A quarantine station to control yellow fever was built and operated from 1896-1898. Saw mills and turpentine camps were erected from time-to-time until the 1920s. Hunting and fishing activities were promoted and cows were grazed on the island.

**WWII Dog Training on Cat Island.** During 1942-43 the U. S. Army’s Quartermaster Corps selected and trained approximately 400 dogs from across the United States to become sentry, mine, scout, or messenger dogs for use in tropical and subtropical combat areas in the Pacific. The Cat Island War Dog Reception and Training Center included officers’ quarters, barracks, a mess hall, dog kennels, a veterinarian hospital, and a barbershop. During that time a secret mission to train dogs to locate and attack enemy soldiers was also conducted on the island. Twenty-five Nisei soldiers, second generation Japanese Americans from Hawaii, were stationed on Ship Island and transported by boat to Cat Island where they worked for several months in secret with select dogs.

Management of the Island

The National Seashore will begin working on a revised General Management Plan within the next several years and specific long-range planning for Cat Island will be accomplished during this process. For the immediate future, Cat Island will be managed in accordance with current guidelines established for the other Mississippi coastal barrier islands within the Seashore.

Picnicking, hiking, beach combing, fishing and other beach activities will be allowed on Cat Island year around. Access will be by private boats or by park-licensed charter boats. Camping sites are limited to 10 persons and must be on sandy beach areas void of vegetation and dune structures.

Campfires are permitted no more than five feet above the high tide line, below any vegetated area. **All pets must be on a leash.** Some sections of the island may be closed during nesting season or when necessary to protect habitat and fragile natural resources. Visitors will be asked to follow “Leave No Trace” ethics and required to carry off their trash. **All glass containers will be prohibited.**

**Private Ownership.** The public should understand that as of right now, much of Cat Island is under private ownership and not yet part of the National Seashore. The sections acquired to date begin at the westernmost tip, extend eastward about three miles and include a one-mile portion from the tip of Goose Point north.

For more information about Cat Island call the William M. Colmer Visitor Center at 228/875-9057.